



Natomas Oral Histories

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Oral interview of

Lois Sherrill

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Interviewer: Coey Sipes
Transcriber: Anne Z. Ofsink

Center for Sacramento History
551 Sequoia Pacific Blvd
Sacramento, CA 95811-0229
(916) 808-7072
csh@cityofsacramento.org
www.centerforsacramentohistory.org
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This is not a verbatim transcript. Parts of the interview have been paraphrased.

Lois: *[Responding to interview outline]* My dad's folks were Pennsylvania Dutch. They probably originated from Germany or Holland, or somewhere over there.

When did they arrive? I don't know. My mother and dad came to California. They were married here in California. My dad came from Colorado to California when he was about 19 years old, and then married my mom. Her folks had come from Texas, and were railroad people. So, they traveled a lot, but they settled in Chico. They met there and got married.

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Why did my family come to Natomas? We came to south Sacramento in the first place. We just came to visit people and came to like it so we stayed. We rented for the first four or five years, and then decided that was for the birds. We looked for property to buy. Everyone said it was cheaper to come out here to the north area. We came out and looked and we were able to buy a house with a very small down payment. It needed a lot of fixing up. That's when we bought this property. It is the only property we've owned in the Sacramento area.

What did they do here? Is that for us?

Coey: Yes.

Lois: Well, Mr. Sherrill worked in pest control all of his working years, mostly for Orchard Supply Company. He first of all did a lot of fertilizing and working on the trucks that sprayed the trees and stuff. Then he started inspecting the houses. He had to go to school and get a license to do that. He did this the rest of his working years.

When were you born, and where? Is that for me?

Coey: Yes.

[00:02:17]

Lois: I was born in Chico, California, July the 12th, 1929.

Did I have any brothers and sisters? There were eleven of us kids. I had 6 brothers and 4 sisters.

What are some of the memories that you have growing up as a young child in Natomas? I didn't grow up in Natomas. We came here as grown-ups.

What language was spoken in your home while you were growing up? English was the only language we ever knew.

Were any cultural customs or traditions maintained? Well, my folks were very religious. There were a lot of us kids. They didn't take us visiting a lot. We mostly just went to church whenever there was a

church service, or a school function. That was our only social life. We enjoyed it; we had all the family games. We used to enjoy having pillow fights. We had feather pillows and didn't mind if they broke open and got feathers all over the house.

Have you been back to your family's country of origin? Well, we were all born right here in the United States, but we spent a lot of time going back to our home city.

What were some of the values and morals you were taught as a child? Honesty. Always be truthful. Always be ambitious. Nobody ever got anything for nothing. You have to work for your living. That was nailed into us from day one.

[00:04:02]

Who were some of the neighbors you associated with living in Natomas? When we first moved here, there wasn't very many houses. The Odams lived next door. There was a house on the other side that had a young couple in. We got acquainted with them, the Hobbses. The Luerces — no, the Luerces didn't live there yet, down the street. There just weren't too many houses here. These people that live right next door to us now have lived here by us for 30 years. The first 12 to 15 years we didn't even know what their name was. We worked all the time, were gone from morning to night. They were, too. We just didn't have time to get acquainted until after we could settle down and retire. Got too old to work anymore.

Were there any other settlements in this area? We were here, when we first came here there was just two streets. Azuza and Hawk Avenues. El Camino didn't come only to Northgate Blvd, there were no Northgate homes yet. See we were here when they built all those, and extended El Camino on down. It used to be we had to come off the levee road on Morale or Azuza at the end. They have them closed off now, but you can see where there was a road that comes down. That was our only way in here. It was just the two streets. It was all tomato fields where the Northgate homes are now. When they built those, then they extended El Camino on down, and we got another road into our house. The only other settlements they had, besides this little area, on the other side of Northgate, they had old Gardenland. That was always there. That was older probably than this district, where we moved into.

[00:06:20]

How were the roads? What were the main roads you used? Are they still there today? Any ferries?

Any lakes or creeks? No, we never had that. The schools — when we moved here, the only school was the old Gardenland School. They built Smythe School. Smythe School was the first one they built. Then as houses were built, they built more schools. They built the Hazel Strauch School and the Rio Tierra School. They came quite a bit later. On the other side of Northgate Boulevard, they had the streets that go on up there, Wisconsin, Tenaya, Cinder Avenue. Some of those were there, but there was nothing on this side of Northgate Boulevard but tomato fields.

Coey: Lots of tomatoes.

Lois: Yes. Japanese farmers. The roads were a single two-lane road. None of the roads were like they are now.

Was farming the single main source of revenue? Absolutely.

What was some of the methods used by various farmers in the area to make this business pay off?

What things hindered them? I don't know. Except, we were pretty young when we moved out here. We didn't know a lot about it. We didn't do any farming ourselves. I can't give you much input there. I imagine the worst thing they had to worry about was too much water in this area.

Coey: Too much water, like floods?

[00:08:08]

Lois: Yes. They didn't have any floods any time since we've been here. I don't know about the years before that. The reason they quit farming in this area is because they zoned it for housing and the farmland was getting taxed too high for the land. So, they had to sell to the people who were going to build the houses. They zoned it for housing, and then the taxes were too high for the farmers. They couldn't get that much out of their crops, so they had to go ahead and sell their farmland to the construction people.

Do you remember any struggles regarding water rights? No, I really don't. They might have had them in the years before us, but we never had any problem like that.

What do you remember about the Natomas Company, RD 1000, flood control, the airport development, etc.? Well, RD 1000, we've always paid taxes to them, or a fee to them, for the maintenance of the levees around here. For years and years, it cost us \$25 per year to have the levees maintained around here.

Do you remember any laws that were passed that were unfair to your parents? The only thing that I thought was unfair was when we moved here, we had a lot of land and could do anything we wanted with it. Then as the city moved in — it was county when we moved in — it restricted the use of our property. We couldn't have farm animals any more.

Coey: Farm animals?

[00:10:21]

Lois: Yes. There were horses in the neighborhood. Some people even I think probably had pigs. We didn't, but we had a neighbor about three houses down that kept horses. They made them get rid of their horses and everything, when we merged into the city. It seemed unfair that we bought houses in the country, and then all of the sudden you are in the city.

Do you think development has hurt the area, or improved it? It's probably been an improvement. It hurt in some ways, but in other ways it has been really good. We've had a lot of updates. When we moved here, there were no sidewalks, there were no driveways, there was no concrete. Everybody was on a septic tank, and since then, we have been able to hook up to a city sewer line, which makes it a lot more pleasant. We have sidewalks now that we can walk on. So, development has helped us a lot. We didn't used to have garbage pickup like we have now. Actually, our main garbage was picked up, but it was voluntary then. Now you are forced to have it. Only, with your water bill comes your garbage bill. It probably is better. We used to be able to burn our trash, our papers, out in a burning barrel in the back yard. They stopped that. There's times when you think you are not moving ahead, but when you look at the overall picture of what we used to have, the improvements have been good.

How did you, your family, your neighbors react to Sacramento? Was it a big deal to go there? How often did you get there? How did you go? Well, we always had a car. We always had jobs that we went back and forth to. That is all we did here was just go back and forth to work. If we went for any recreation, we went out of town. We like to boat, we like to fish, we like to water ski, so we went to Folsom Lake. After they built Oroville Lake we went there once or twice. So, most of the time it was away from our home for all of our recreation.

[00:13:03]

Can you tell us the origins of the place names in this area? The current Bannon Creek was originally Brannon on a map from 1910. Do you know when or how the name was changed? No, I don't. When we came out here you couldn't get over to where Bannon Creek is now. You had to come in some other way to get there. I never even knew of it.

Coey: What did you and your family do for entertainment?

Lois: Mostly outdoor activities. We camped, fished, hunted, water-skied, and we picnicked. All the things we did were outdoors. Other than that, when we were home, it was just work. All work and no play.

Coey: Right. Would you like to say your name?

Lois: I'm Mrs. Sherrill. I'm Lois Sherrill, my husband is Bernard Sherrill. We've lived in this area for a long time. We couldn't live anywhere else now.

Coey: All right. Thank you.